

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

In the Business of Business

Land-Grant universities lend a hand on mainstreet.

Successful businesses know when to diversify and spot trends, seize opportunities and plan successfully. Often those are skills learned in the school of hard knocks and many can't afford the tuition – economically distressed communities, at-risk youth, low-income families and businesses struggling to cope with changing markets. The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Land-Grant universities help rural communities, existing businesses and budding entrepreneurs learn the business of business.

Payoff

- **Spotting textile trends.** At **Auburn** University, scientists developed a system to evaluate consumer preferences for textiles and apparel. The system is the first to factor in the role of lifestyle perceptions, consumer aspirations and the media in product selections. It will help manufacturers, advertisers and retailers in Alabama and elsewhere more efficiently gather market information and anticipate emerging consumer preferences. *Vanity Fair* magazine is funding a feasibility study to apply this methodology to apparel product testing.
- **A boost back in the saddle.** With the closing of an apparel manufacturing plant in a rural **Kentucky** community, unemployment reached an all-time high of 23 percent. In four workshops, **Kentucky** Extension helped 84 people develop skills in communication, resume writing, completing application forms, wardrobe planning and other basic life skills. A follow-up survey showed that the information helped 68 percent of participants find employment.
- **The new face of business.** A **Maryland** Extension program teaches youth to establish and operate small businesses while addressing low self-esteem, lack of job skills and limited knowledge of entrepreneurship. Youth learn to conduct self-assessments, identify opportunities, develop business and marketing ideas, advertise, keep records and develop business plans. Participants have established an infant clothing business, developed an African-American greeting card company and sold holiday gifts, crafts, baked goods and T-shirts.
- **Keeping mainstreet humming.** A rural entrepreneur training program coordinated by **Nebraska** Extension helps participants learn to evaluate product lines, under-

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stand pricing structures and analyze cash flow. Entrepreneurs train others who want to start, expand or sell a business. Since 1993, participants have created more than 500 full-time jobs in Nebraska. Enrollees last year created 59 full-time and 19 part-time jobs in small towns. As a result of an **Auburn** Extension program targeted at small towns in Alabama, 30 new businesses were created and 64 companies expanded operations, adding more than 1,100 jobs in the state.

- **Export Support.** The Global Marketing Support Services Program from **Arkansas** Extension created more than 18,000 new jobs in the past six years. Exports from small businesses in four metropolitan areas increased from about \$603 million to more than \$1 billion. Working with other state and federal programs, extension specialists provide assistance on topics from international marketing plans to pricing and shipping.
- **Doing fine with wine.** In **California's** Mariposa County, extension offered workshops, tours, seminars and one-on-one consultations that resurrected the area's long-dead wine grape industry. More than 125 acres of premium wine grapes have been planted in the county, and three wineries have been established. Planning is under way to plant an additional 50 acres to wine grapes. Extension also conducted programs on olive oil production. Two farmers are establishing new olive orchards, and one family is bringing an established orchard, abandoned 40 years ago, back into production.
- **Just peachy.** With help from **Colorado State** Extension, Dolores County received an economic boost via establishment of two lawn-care companies, two marketing companies, a video store, a commercial sign maker and an optical laboratory, as well as expansion of a packaging company. In the Grand Junction area, extension staff helped train women in food processing who now work with local peach producers to turn about 350,000 pounds of overripe peaches that were previously discarded into canned and dried products. As a result, niche-market, special-label products were sold and food processor trainees gained job skills. **Colorado** is a partner with **Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas** and **Utah** in other rural business development efforts.

- **Business is hopping.** **Maryland** Extension helped 81 producers establish a cooperative for producing and marketing rabbit, goat and lamb. Specialists provided business, management and marketing training and information on animal nutrition, health and reproduction. In 1997, the cooperative contracted with one of the largest distributors of food products in the United States. Since then, an average of 2,000 pounds of rabbit meat products have been processed and marketed bi-weekly.
- **Super-duper tubers.** Experts at **North Dakota State** analyzed the soil and water in central North Dakota to document the potential for irrigated potatoes there and explored the economic potential for diversifying into high-value crops. As a result, a new french fry plant has been built in Jamestown and an existing plant in Grand Forks has been expanded twice. The Jamestown operation resulted in \$20 million annually in direct revenue to farmers and added more than 280 new jobs. Specialists have turned their attention to about 430,000 acres in Montana and western North Dakota that could be irrigated. Producers hope another processing plant can be built in that area.
- **Helping home-based businesses.** Since 1985, **Oklahoma State** Extension has helped 23,000 small businesses get started in marketing products and services. Studies show that more than 80 percent of home-based businesses contacting the program are still in business after four years, compared to a national report indicating that only 60 percent of small businesses survive that long. Another **Oklahoma State** program focuses on helping local businesses improve customer service so that they can remain competitive as national retailers move in and local economies evolve.



**Cooperative State Research, Education,
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Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service in cooperation with the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy, the Academic Programs Committee on Organization and Policy, the International Programs Committee on Organization and Policy, and the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

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